SPORT

Ammar, Azan hit tons in President's Trophy

By Our Sports Reporter

KARACHI: Wapda's Mohammad Ammar's and Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited's (SNGPL) Azan Awais hit centuries as the third round of the President's Trophy got underway across four venues here on Friday.

Ammar arrived at the crease with Wapda reeling at 70-5 against Sahir Associates at the UBL Sports Complex and went on to put up a 264-ball stand for 140 runs, striking 22 fours during the knock.

He combined for 237 runs along with skipper Khalid Usman, who contributed 93 off 174 as Wapda ended the day strong with 307-6 on the board. Sahir Associates' Khan Zaib impressed with figures of 3-70.

Azan, meanwhile, held SNGPL together, scoring 103 off 242, as the team put up 197-4 against State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) at the State Bank Stadium.

The left-hander's innings was decorated with 13 fours and six. Captain Shan Masood, meanwhile, added 35 off 72. Shahid Aziz bagged two wickets for SBP.

At the National Bank Stadium, veteran pacer Mir Hamza took 5-55 as Ghani Glass bundled out Pakistan Television (PTV). In-form youngster Shamyl Hussain top-scored for PTV with a brisk 68.

In turn, Ghani Glass reached 109-5 at stumps, still trailing by 77 runs.

At the NBP Sports Complex, pacer Mohammad Hamza continued his superb form to bag 4-31 while Ahmed Bashir took three wickets as Khan Research Laboratories dismissed Oil and Gas Development Company (OGDCL) for 244.

Danish Aziz's fighting 56, that included seven fours, was the only notable contribution coming from an OGDCL batter.

JEDDAH: Real Madrid's Rodrygo Goes shoots to score during the Spanish Super Cup semi-final against Atletico Madrid at the King Abdullah Sports City.—Reuters

Real edge Atletico to set up Clasico Spanish Super Cup final

JEDDAH: Xabi Alonso's Real Madrid beat Atletico Madrid 2-1 in a tight Spanish Super Cup semi-final in Saudi Arabia on Thursday to set up a Clasico final clash against rivals Barcelona.

Fede Valverde's blistering free-kick and a Rodrygo Goes strike helped Madrid claim a fifth consecutive victory across all competitions, with Alexander Sorloth pulling one back for Diego Simeone's Atletico, who came up short in Jeddah.

Alonso was close to the sack after a run of inconsistent form towards the end of 2025 but his team have slowly found their footing in the shape of positive results, even if some performances have not been entirely convincing.

The Spanish coach led Madrid to a win over Barcelona in his first Clasico at the helm in October, before his team began to slump.

"After so many games without scoring, today was a great game to get back to it, to help the team win," Valverde told Movistar after netting his first goal of the campaign.

"We have to keep being self-critical too, we had chances but they had more and played much better than us, we have to keep correcting that and improving."

Alonso did not agree with Valverde's analysis.

"It's a semi-final, having scored early gives you that advantage that you want to defend," said the coach. "There were phases where we were defending but the objective was to go through to the final, and we're happy to be playing that on Sunday."

With French superstar Kylian Mbappe out as he recovers from a knee sprain, Alonso kept young striker Gonzalo Garcia in the centre of the attack after his hat-trick against Real Betis on Sunday.

Atletico beat their city rivals 5-2 when the teams met in September in a La Liga derby but this was a far closer affair.

Los Blancos took the lead after just two minutes when Valverde's ferocious free-kick flew past Sorloth in a poorly-positioned wall and rocketed past Jan Oblak.

The Norwegian Atletico forward might have done more to block it and Oblak got his hand to the shot but could not keep it out because of the sheer power.

Valverde celebrated vehemently, slapping his own head, clearly delighted at breaking his duck in a difficult season to date.

By taking the lead Real Madrid earned the right to sit deeper and force Atletico to try and attack them to pull back level.

Madrid hit the Rojiblancos when they could on the counter, with Oblak saving well from Rodrygo after he floated inside from the right.

Atletico began to create some chances and could have pulled level before the interval.

Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois tipped away Sorloth's header and then the target man clumsily nodded Conor Gallagher's cross off-target from close range.

Rodrygo extended Madrid's lead in the 55th minute with his third goal in five games, continuing a rich vein of form across the past few weeks after a run where he failed to score for 32 games straight.

The Brazilian found a gap to burst through in the middle of Atletico's defence and kept his cool to sweep the ball past Oblak.

Three minutes later Atletico hit back, with Sorloth finally finding the net with a header from Giuliano Simeone's cross.

The striker gave defender Raul Asencio just enough of a shove to put him off without being penalised for it before nodding in.

"Valverde scored a great goal, it was an extraordinary free-kick," said Atletico coach Simeone. "Despite that my team played very well, but we had to win and didn't, they had the quality to be able to finish (their chances)."

The Atletico coach goaded Madrid winger Vinicius Junior when he was substituted, with the Brazilian failing to score for a 16th consecutive game.

"I didn't like that, I saw (Simeone) said something to Vinicius, and for me that goes against the respect that you should have for opponents... you can't just do anything (you want)," said Alonso.

Madrid face Barcelona on Sunday in the final at the King Abdullah Sports City stadium after the Catalans thrashed Athletic Bilbao 5-0 on Wednesday.—AFP

AC Milan scrape a point with Genoa after late penalty howler

MILAN: AC Milan survived late penalty drama to scrape a 1-1 home draw with Genoa on Thursday, a result which allowed local rivals Inter Milan to establish a three-point lead at the top of Serie A.

Nicolae Stanciu ballooned a golden chance to snatch a shock win from the spot for Genoa deep in stoppage time of a thrilling encounter at the San Siro in which Milan laid seige to the opposition goal.

Rafael Leao gave Milan a point with his powerful header in the second minute of added time, breaking Genoa's long resistance after the away side took the lead through Lorenzo Colombo just before the half-hour mark.

But moments later Davide Bartesaghi clattered into Mikael Ellertsson, leaving Stanciu with the task of beating France goalkeeper Mike Maignan and taking a shock three points.

Instead Stanciu smashed his effort over the bar and second-placed Milan extended their unbeaten league run to 17 matches, although Inter are further away after beating Parma 2-0 on Wednesday.

Milan travel to Fiorentina on Sunday before taking on high-flying Como — their game in hand due to their participation in the Italian Super Cup in Saudi Arabia — this time next week.

"What we need to learn is that when you score in the last minute you still have four minutes to win the game against a team which has suffered a psychological blow," said Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri to DAZN.

"We should have created a couple of opportunities without exposing ourselves to a counter-attack which almost cost us the match."

Stanciu's last-gasp error left Genoa one place and three points above the relegation zone with next two matches against Cagliari and Parma, two teams who are also fighting against the drop.

It was especially painful after Daniele De Rossi's team held off an attacking onslaught from Milan in the second half, with Christian Pulisic being denied an earlier leveller for handball and nearly rattling home a stunning volley.

"The draw means a lot for us, we came into this game after four performances that were not positive, but today we were really good," said Colombo, who in on loan at Genoa from his boyhood club Milan.

"We showed that we can have a say, that we have character, and we came very close to winning. Let's say that the glass is half-full." Jamie Vardy's goal and assist wasn't enough for Cremonese who threw away a two-goal lead at half-time to draw 2-2 with Cagliari.

Former England striker Vardy, who set up Dennis Johnsen's early opener, took his Italian tally to five in the 29th minute when he forced a low drive under Cagliari goalkeeper Elia Caprile.

But Michel Adopo halved the deficit for Cagliari shortly after the break before teenage academy product Yael Trepy snatched a point with two minutes remaining by brilliantly firing home his first Serie A goal.

Promoted Cremonese haven't won in five matches but are nine points above the relegation zone in 13th place.—AFP

MILAN: AC Milan's Rafael Leao (C) fights for the ball with Genoa's Leo Ostigard (L) and Alessandro Marcandalli during their Serie A match at San Siro.—Reuters

Lacklustre Arsenal held to dour 0-0 draw by Liverpool

LONDON: Arsenal missed the chance to go eight points clear at the top of the Premier League in a turgid 0-0 draw with champions Liverpool at a rain-drenched Emirates Stadium on Thursday.

Mikel Arteta's side had won seven successive home league games and were expected to take advantage of their title rivals dropping points the previous night against an injury-hit Liverpool who started without a recognised striker.

Liverpool looked in danger of being overrun early on but grew in stature and came closest to breaking the deadlock when Conor Bradley struck the crossbar in the first half.

Arsenal sent on a host of attacking substitutes after the break but too little effect as a cagey game petered out.

The draw put Arsenal six points clear of Manchester City and Aston Villa while Liverpool remain fourth, 14 points adrift despite a nine-game unbeaten league run.

Arsenal failed to exert any pressure on Liverpool in a forgettable second half and did not earn a corner until deep in stoppage time but even their famed set-pieces proved harmless.

There were glum faces among the Arsenal players at fulltime and in the stands, although with 17 games remaining the London club are favourites to claim a first English title since 2004.

"The second half was a real struggle," Arteta said. "These games need a magic moment but it didn't happen. But if you can't win it then don't lose it. We have had a very demanding schedule with six games over the Christmas period and we have come out of that in a really strong position." Liverpool were worth their point but suffered more injury woe late on when Bradley left the field on a stretcher — the incident causing an ugly melee after Gabriel Martinelli tried to push the stricken player off the pitch and was booked.

"I understand you want to win, we want to win as well, but I think the health of a player is much more important than something else," Liverpool midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai said.

With City held to a third successive draw on Wednesday and Aston Villa also dropping points, the stage looked set for Arsenal to take a stranglehold on the title race.

They dominated possession in the opening stages with Liverpool camped in their own half but only had one effort by the lively Bukayo Saka to show for their early authority.

Liverpool, without injured leading scorer Hugo Ekitike, Alexander Isak and Mohamed Salah, had the first big chance though thanks to a mix-up between William Saliba and Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya.

Saliba's over-hit back pass forced Raya into a hurried clearance and the ball fell to Bradley who spotted Raya off his line but his chip bounced back off the crossbar before Cody Gakpo's follow-up was blocked.

With Arsenal becalmed, Liverpool began to control the tempo although the hosts did occasionally threaten.

Leandro Trossard had one effort deflected wide for Arsenal from a counter-attack with Liverpool furious that the game had continued with Jeremie Frimpong down injured at the other end.

The pattern continued in the second half with Arsenal passive and it was no surprise when manager Arteta sent on Brazilian duo Gabriel Jesus and Martinelli for the disappointing Viktor Gyokeres and Trossard.

That having made no difference to Arsenal's attacking threat, Arteta rolled the dice again by unleashing Eberechi Eze and Noni Madueke from the bench with 10 minutes left.

Madueke flashed a pass across the face of goal but Arsenal's four-pronged attack could make no impact as they failed to score in the league for the first time since a 1-0 loss at Liverpool in August.—Reuters

LONDON: Arsenal's Gabriel Magalhaes (obscured) has a final chance at the back post from a corner as the last action of the Premier League match against Liverpool at the Emirates Stadium.—AFP

Sabalenka gets revenge over Keys in Brisbane

BRISBANE: World number one Aryna Sabalenka sent an Australian Open warning as she beat Madison Keys on Friday in Brisbane in a repeat of last year's Melbourne final.

Keys stunned Sabalenka nearly 12 months ago but the Belarusian took revenge on the American with a statement 6-3, 6-3 victory to reach the semi-finals.

Keys was playing less than 24 hours after her marathon three-hour win over Russia's Diana Shnaider and had heavy strapping on her thigh.

She turned in an uncharacteristically error-strewn performance and struggled on serve as Sabalenka struck a series of superb returns.

Sabalenka is aiming for her third Melbourne title in four years when the Australian Open begins on Jan 18.

She will play Czech surprise package Karolina Muchova in the last four after the 11th seed held her nerve to see off world number five Elena Rybakina 6-2, 2-6, 6-4.

Muchova raced through the first set against an out-of-sorts Rybakina, who eventually found some rhythm to claim the second.

But Muchova broke the former Wimbledon champion once in the third set to get over the line, helped by her opponent's 42 unforced errors.

Muchova has won her past three matches against Sabalenka, although the last was in 2024 at the China Open.

Fourth seed Jessica Pegula moved into the semi-finals with a comfortable 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) win over Russian Liudmila Samsonova.

She will now play Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk for a place in the final after Kostyuk upset rising Russian star Mirra Andreeva 7-6 (9/7), 6-3.

In the men's draw, former world number one Daniil Medvedev came from a set down to beat Poland's Kamil Majchrzak 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 6-2 to set up a semi-final against Alex Michelsen of the US.

The second semi-final will be an all-American clash between Brandan Nakashima and Aleksandar Kovacevic.—AFP

BRISBANE: Madison Keys of the US hits a return to Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka during their Brisbane International match on Friday.—AFP

Swiatek steers Poland to United Cup semis

SYDNEY: World number two Iga Swiatek defied a partisan crowd to thrash Australian Maya Joint in Sydney on Friday and help take Poland into a United Cup semi-final clash with the USA.

Joint is a talent at age 19 but she was blown away by the six-time Grand Slam champion, Swiatek teaching her a lesson in a 6-1, 6-1 victory in 58 minutes.

The 24-year-old Swiatek will be among the favourites when the Australian Open starts on January 18 and this showed why as she won a third match in a row.

Alex de Minaur defeated Hubert Hurkacz 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 in the men's singles to level the quarter-final at 1-1 and give the hosts hope.

However, Poland won the deciding mixed doubles to set up a last-four showdown with reigning champions the United States in a repeat of last year's final.

That tees up Swiatek against world number four Coco Gauff. The other semi-final on Saturday is between Belgium and Switzerland.—AFP

Semis line-up decided at national U-21 snooker

KARACHI: Mohammad Farhan, Jahanzaib Jahangir, Shahzaib Rafique and Barjees Khan won their respective quarter-finals in the 15th edition of the National Junior U-21 Snooker Championship here at the Jahangir Khan Sports Complex on Friday

Punjab's Farhan beat Ubaidullah Jan of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 4-2 (48-68, 84(70)-12, 65-48, 67-33, 28-64, 100 (100)-0), Jahanzaib of Balochistan outplayed Punjab's Mohammad Aqib 4-1 (65-35, 46-59, 75-14, 63-13, 57-18), KP's Shahzaib Rafique routed Sheikh Mohammad Muzammil of Islamabad 4-1 (60-47, 25-59, 56-54, 68-38, 49-35) while Barjees of Islamabad defeated Punjab's Mohsin Kamal 4-3 (20-55, 60-7, 50-10, 27-56, 69-44, 28-56, 55-8) to move into the semi-finals to be held on Saturday.

Results:

Quarter-finals: Mohammad Farhan (Punjab) bt Ubaidullah Jan (KP) 4-2 (48-68, 84(70)-12, 65-48, 67-33, 28-64, 100 (100)-0); Jahanzaib Jahangir (Balochistan) bt Mohammad Aqib (Punjab) 4-1 (65-35, 46-59, 75-14, 63-13, 57-18); Shahzaib Rafique (KP) bt Sheikh Mohammad Muzammil (Islamabad) 4-1 (60-47, 25-59, 56-54, 68-38, 49-35); Barjees Khan (Islamabad) bt Mohsin Kamal (Punjab) 4-3 (20-55, 60-7, 50-10, 27-56, 69-44, 28-56, 55-8)

Second round: Barjees Khan (Islamabad) bt Malik Muzammil (KP) 3-0 (57-46, 61-21, 60-39); Mohammad Farhan (Punjab) bt Dheeraj Kumar (Sindh) 3-1 (0-1, 63-0, 64-25, 63-15); Jahanzaib Jahangir (Balochistan) bt Aliyan Zamin (Punjab) 3-0 (57-47, 54-13, 53-51); Shahzaib Rafique (KP) bt Ayan Ali (Sindh) 3-2 (9-54, 61-32, 72-35, 47-65, 86-46); Sheikh Mohammad Muzammil (Islamabad) bt Rehan Ali (Sindh) 3-1 (78-31, 15-62, 60-15, 85-34); Mohammad Adil (KP) bt Mohammad Aqib (Punjab) 3-2 (75-64, 63-46, 41-73, 45-70, 50-44); Mohsin Kamal (Punjab) bt Ali Raza (Balochistan) 3-0 (48-39, 65-56, 54-42); Ubaidullah Jan (KP) bt S. Zain Zadi (Sindh) 3-0 (65-10, 53-12, 47-14).—Sports Reporter